

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



# Wonders

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of HaRav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

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שַׁבַּת וַיֵּצֵא ח-ט כְּסֵלוֹ תשפ"ו 🌸



“ He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the Cedar in the Lebanon to the hyssop that comes out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes. ”

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

"...It would be proper  
to publish your classes  
in book form.  
With blessings for success..."

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# Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens  
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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# CLASS EXCERPT

## CONNECTING TO THE SOURCE OF LIFE

*One of the most difficult things to integrate into our consciousness is that life cannot be taken for granted. Life is given to us from above by God. This realization usually hits us when there is a serious disruption in our confidence in our life and unfortunately, most everyone faces this at one point or another.*

*So why is it that we usually don't feel the flow of life from above? And how can that flow renew if it seems to stop?*

*In this excerpt from a class given on Simchat Torah 5786 in connection with the hopes that the hostages would be released, HaRav Ginsburgh discusses the levels of life in the soul as they were described by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe.*

*This class was first published in the Bereishit 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.*

### DRAWING LIFE FROM THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE

**I**n the annals of Chasidut, the event that is most similar to the release of our hostages on *Hoshana Rabbah* was the release of the Friediker Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn from his imprisonment almost 100 years ago in 1927. Every year, on his day of redemption, he would teach a Chasidic essay and in 1934 it was based on the verse, “He places our soul in life and prevents our feet from slipping”<sup>1</sup> (הָשֵׁם נִפְשֵׁנוּ בְּחַיִּים וְלֹא נָתַן לְמוֹט רַגְלֵנוּ).

The question asked about this verse is why should the soul be placed “in life?” The soul is by definition life, and it gives life to the body. One of the levels of the soul is known as “essential life” and

another is known as, “life that gives life.” The soul itself is life, even before it is encloded in a body, and once it does so, it gives life to the body as a whole and to each individual part of the body. However, the point is that the soul is a creation, therefore it is by definition limited and must draw down life from the life of all life, the Creator. That is why, “He places our soul in life.”

To better understand this, we need to order the different levels of life-force in the soul and see how they relate to being placed in the life of the Creator. Chasidic writings are relativistic in nature. Depending on the subject matter, the same analysis may yield what seems like different structures and parallels. We are going to take a bird's-eye view of the different levels of life over many of these teachings.

1. Psalms 66:9.

The level of “essential life” (חי בעצם) is at times associated with the *sefirah* of crown (*keter*) considered a dimensionless point (נקודה דלא נעיץ) while the level of “life that gives life” (חיים להחיות) would then be associated with the *sefirah* of wisdom (*chochmah*), following the verse, “Wisdom gives life to its owner.”<sup>2</sup> In other sources, we find that “essential life” is wisdom and “life that gives life” is in understanding (*binah*), since understanding is the mother principle that begets the (Divine) emotions in the heart. Still other sources correspond “essential life” with understanding and “life that gives life with *Ze’er Anpin*, i.e., the emotions in the heart, since they unite and give life to kingdom (*malchut*), the faculties of action (think: doing something with heart or half-heartedly). The final option also appears, which corresponds “essential life” with *Ze’er Anpin* and “life that gives life” with kingdom. Kingdom corresponds to the World of Action, the common ground for all our actions.

What is common to all these correspondences is that “essential life” is what fuels “life that gives life.” What changes is their placement depending on what is being given life, what is being energized: be it the point of wisdom upon which all consciousness exists, or the ability to beget Divine feelings, or the various actions we are commanded to perform, etc.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, we have seen four distinct levels of life. The first is the Divine source of life, which is entirely above human nature. This is where God “places our soul” when He gives it life. Then there is the essential life of the soul, as created by God. Lower than that are the two levels of the soul known as “life that gives life”: the first refers to the overall, comprehensive life-force the soul gives the body. The second refers to the life-force instilled within each individual organ and power in the body. These four levels of life can now be drawn into a model that parallels the four letters of God’s essential Name, *Havayah*.

letter	level of life	Hebrew term
<i>yud</i>	Divine source of life	השם נפשנו בחיים
<i>hei</i>	soul’s essential life	חי בעצם
<i>vav</i>	soul giving overall life to body	חיים להחיות הגוף בכלל
<i>hei</i>	soul giving life to individual organs	חיים להחיות בפרט

The point is that sometimes a person experiences a weakness (for instance when someone is held hostage or is incarcerated) that can reach all the way to his or her soul’s essential life. In such situations, the person requires an infusion of new life

from the Divine source of all life and that is why “God places our soul in life,” i.e., in His Divine source of all life to strengthen the essential life of the soul and the two lower levels of “life that gives life.”

2. Ecclesiastes 7:12.

3. The relationship between the two aspects of “essential life” and “life that gives life” is in its most general sense a manifestation of the relationship between “surrounding light” (סובב) and “inner

light” (ממלא). Surrounding light is always in the background, hovering above the inner light, which penetrates into the destination where the light will end up.

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# THE SONG OF CREATION PART 1

**T**he idea that every element of creation has a special song it sings forms the basis of an intriguing and mysterious collection edited by the rabbinic sages of the Mishnaic period and known as *Perek Shirah*, whose literal meaning is “A Chapter of Song.” The song each part of creation sings is mostly a verse from the Tanach. The connection between the singer and the verse that is its song is not explained, though oftentimes, the verses do mention or allude to that specific creature. In any case, especially when there is no mention of the part of creation singing, we are left to contemplate why each creation is singing its particular verse. Some commentaries suggest that the song reveals a creature’s purpose or Divine inspiration and will be revealed more fully in the future.

*Perek Shirah* consists of six chapters, each chapter grouping together similar creatures. The first chapter includes the songs of elements related to the earth: the wilderness, fields, the seas, wellsprings, and rivers. The second chapter describes the songs of the elements of the heavens: day and night, the sun, the moon and stars, clouds, lightning, rain, and dew. The third chapter is devoted to the songs of the vegetable kingdom: a variety of trees, the grapevine, wheat and barley, vegetables, and grasses. The fourth chapter gives voice to the songs of a wide variety of birds and fish. The fifth chapter highlights the songs of the animals, both wild and domesticated. The sixth and last chapter enumerates the songs of the creeping creatures.

## WHO IS SINGING IN PEREK SHIRAH?

**A**n important question asked by commentators down the ages is who exactly is singing the songs attributed to each part of creation and each creature. Four basic answers are given, each one true from its own perspective. Thus, the four answers are not in contradiction with each other, rather they ultimately are seen as complimentary.<sup>1</sup>

## FIRST OPINION: CREATION IS SINGING

**T**he first opinion given by a minority of commentators is that it is the part of creation itself that is singing the song attributed to them. This implies that even inanimate objects have some sort of life force and consciousness allowing them to sing in some manner.<sup>2</sup>

Maimonides, in his classic work, the *Guide to the Perplexed*, states that the lower elements of creation do not have consciousness.<sup>3</sup> According to this opinion, it must be someone else singing these songs.

The Arizal, the famous Kabbalist of Safed in the 1500’s, taught differently though. He states that all four levels of creation—inanimate, vegetable, animal, and human—all have life force and consciousness, albeit on very different levels. All manifestations of reality are animated by a spark of God, and in this sense every point of creation has life force. Therefore, there is a way to understand that even the lower elements

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1. See also *Music: The Quill of the Soul*, ch. 8.

2. *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 258.

3. *Guide to the Perplexed* 3:17.

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of creation are themselves singing their particular song, on whatever level of consciousness they have.

The Book of Kings describes the wisdom of king Solomon as follows:

He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the Cedar in the Lebanon to the hyssop that comes out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fishes.<sup>4</sup>

Some commentators explain that Solomon knew the healing properties of trees, plants, and herbs and the essential properties of all animals. Other commentators though, based on various Midrashic traditions interpret the words, “he spoke of” to mean “he spoke *with*” trees, plants, and herbs, as well as the animals, understanding their language and communicating with them.<sup>5</sup> Many other Jewish sources describe animals, vegetation and even inanimate objects speaking and communicating with God and man.

## SECOND OPINION: ANGELS ARE SINGING

**T**he second opinion is that the angel, or the spiritual minister, or the *mazal* responsible for each element of creation is singing the songs of *Perek Shirah*. That every creation has a guiding angel—a natural force that is responsible for it—is stated in the Midrash: “There is no blade of grass that does not have a minister that strikes it from above and tells it to ‘grow.’”<sup>6</sup> In addition to every individual blade of

grass having a corresponding angel above, we are taught that grass, as a species, also has an angel who helps direct its collective development. This is true of all individual creatures and species in creation.

We are similarly taught that each person has his or her particular guiding angel. *Rashi* comments that when Jacob fought “with a man”<sup>7</sup> it was actually the angel of Esau. As the morning came and the angel saw he could not defeat Jacob he said: “Let me go for it is dawn.”<sup>8</sup> *Rashi*, comments that the reason the angel desired to leave just then was that it needed to return to the heavenly abode to sing God’s praise by day.

Each nation as well has one leading angel who helps direct their affairs from the upper world. After letting the Israelites leave Egypt, Pharaoh had a change of heart. He gathered his armies and gave chase: “Pharaoh approached; the Israelites lifted up their eyes and behold Egypt was journeying after them and they were frightened...”<sup>9</sup> *Rashi* explains that they beheld the guardian angel of Egypt coming from heaven to assist the Egyptians.

According to this second opinion, it is these spiritual ministers or angels that sing the song of each creation.

## THIRD OPINION: MANKIND IS SINGING

**T**he third opinion is that it is neither creation nor an angel, but man who is singing the songs of each creature in *Perek Shirah*. As man observes the world he lives in, he learns various lessons and obtains wisdom from contemplating the

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4. 1 Kings 5:12-13.

5. See the commentary of Avraham ben Shlomo (ראב"ש).

6. *Bereishit Rabbah* 10:6.

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7. On Genesis 32:25 quoting *Bereishit Rabbah* 77:3.

8. Genesis 32:27.

9. Exodus 14:10.

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workings of heaven and earth, the cycles of nature and the plethora of living creatures that inhabit our planet. The sages state, “Who is wise? One who learns from every individual.”<sup>10</sup> Just as we learn from each human being, so too we can learn from each and every one of God’s creatures. Enlightenment and insight can come from observing a falling leaf, an ant colony busy at work, the ever-changing shapes of the clouds, spring flowers in full bloom, a bubbling brook, a bird building her nest, a tree standing dormant in the snow, and a sunset over the ocean. We human beings interpret, integrate, and are inspired by the world around us and these insights and deep identification with creation are translated into the various songs of each element in nature.

A verse reads, “Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and Who makes us wiser than the birds of the skies?”<sup>11</sup> It is stated in the Talmud, in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, that had the Torah not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, the prohibition regarding theft from the ant, faithfulness in relationships from the dove, and the way of proper marital relations from fowl.<sup>12</sup> This world-view sees life as the greatest teacher. Learning from everyone and everything arouses great wonder and inspiration and a psychological affinity towards all creation, causing man to sing the song of that creature or creation. Now that we have both the Torah and *Perek Shirah*, we can learn and intuit each creature’s very essence as it is revealed by the verses

attributed to them.

When Adam was first placed in the Garden of Eden, the Torah relates that God brought all the animals to Adam to see what he would name them, “and whatever Adam called it, that was its name.”<sup>13</sup> It is explained in Kabbalah that Adam, upon deep contemplation, was able to intuit the essence of each animal and could thereby choose the exact Hebrew name that would best convey that essence, and “that was its name.”<sup>14</sup> The process of giving names to all the animals is similar to recognizing which song each creature sings.

#### FOURTH OPINION: GOD IS SINGING

**T**he fourth opinion is that it is God singing the song of each part of creation. According to the idea that God speaks or “sings” the world into creation, that original energy of song continues to exist in every part of creation. Alternatively, it is the *Shechinah*—the Divine Presence, indwelling within each creation—that is singing through them. We are taught that the *Shechinah* spoke through the throat of Moses.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, God as Creator is the mouth, as it were, vitalizing every part of creation with song. Indeed, this idea corresponds to the Kabbalistic notion that every part of creation is animated by a spark of Godliness.

These four opinions each contain a kernel of truth, and all together complement each other, providing a deep understanding of how different levels of truth and reality interconnect and ultimately fuse together in perfect unity.

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10. *Avot* 4:1

11. *Job* 35:11

12. *Eiruvin* 100b

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13. *Genesis* 2:19

14. *Bereishit Rabbah* 17:4. *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 6.

15. *Zohar* 3:232a. *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 257.

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## STORY

# REBBE BARUCH OF MEZHIBUZH: TRUE SELF SACRIFICE WITH HIDDEN COMPASSION

*Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh was born in 5513 (1753) to Rabbi Yechiel Michel Ashkenazi and Adel, the only daughter of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He grew up with his grandfather for three years, and was then educated by the Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye, and Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz. He also learned from Rabbi Ze'ev Kitzes while living in Ostroh. He married the daughter of one of Ostroh's wealthy men, Rabbi Tuvia Katzkess. So long as his teachers were alive, he refused to assume the mantle of Rebbe, but in 5540 (1780) he was accepted as Rebbe in the town of Tulchyn, his father's place of residence, from where he led his court. In 5548 (1788) he moved to Mezhibuzh, but continued to visit Tulchyn periodically, residing there exclusively during the summer months.*

*Rebbe Baruch was known for his strict demeanor and exact demands. He applied to himself the Zohar's phrase from the "Brich Shmei" prayer, "And may I be appointed and rule among the righteous." He passed away on the 18th of Kislev and was buried in Mezhibuzh, in close proximity to his grandfather the Ba'al Shem Tov. Today their graves are in the same building (ohel).*

In the year 5603 (1843), the Russian government called a rabbinical conference in Petersburg to discuss several matters pertaining to the religious life of the Jews. Chosen for the conference were: the Rebbe the *Tzemach Tzedek* of Lubavitch, Rabbi Yitzchak (Iche) of Volozhin, the wealthy Rabbi Yisrael Halperin from Berditchev, and Mr. Betzalel Stern, principal of the school in Odessa.

When the *Tzemach Tzedek* returned home to Lubavitch from his journey, he heard the *chasidim* saying about him that he had sacrificed himself in Petersburg for the sake of the Jewish people. The Rebbe wept profusely and said: "Woe to him whom the world misunderstands!" And then the Rebbe added and said: "Can this be called self-sacrifice!? When a person sacrifices himself for the Jewish people yet still has an underlying ulterior motive to augment his reward in the World to Come!? There is nothing remarkable about this! True self-sacrifice is like what I heard about the holy Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh, of blessed memory, who sacrificed himself and his World to Come for the sake of one individual Jew. Moreover, not for that man's life, but merely for saving his property!"

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The *Tzemach Tzedek* then told the *chasidim* about Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh's self-sacrifice:

One of Rebbe Baruch's close followers, a pious and God-fearing *chasid*, was a wine merchant who would transport wine to distant cities. This merchant did not have enough money himself to purchase the wine, but because he was known as an honest and trustworthy man, the successful wine merchants would give him goods on credit. Once, while he was on the road at an inn, he was suddenly struck with thoughts of repentance over some matter he had not properly rectified. In his intense awakening to sincere repentance, he abandoned the wagons with the wine at the inn and went to Mezhibuzh.

When he came to the holy Rebbe, Rebbe Baruch asked him about his business and trade, and the man told him everything that had happened. When Rebbe Baruch heard that he had left the wine abandoned at the inn, he began to berate and rebuke him: "You fool! How dare you abandon other people's property for no reason?"

This was on Friday afternoon. Later, on Friday night during the meal, and again the next day, Rebbe Baruch continued to rebuke and insult him with all kinds of reproaches and denigrations, shaming him publicly before all those present. Rebbe Baruch's in-law, the righteous Rabbi Avraham of Chmelnik (Khmilnyk), of blessed memory, was a guest there at the time. Rabbi Avraham couldn't contain himself, seeing the great humiliation of the man, and turned to Rebbe Baruch with a question: "My in-law! What about the Talmud's statement, 'Whoever shames his fellow in public...?'"<sup>1</sup>

Rebbe Baruch replied: Do I not know that one who shames his fellow in public has no share in the World to Come? But I have forsaken my World to Come to do good for this man. His wagon drivers had conspired among themselves to steal all his wine and cause him great loss. However, the pain and suffering the man endured from my reproaches and insults saved him from their plans. The pain of financial loss was exchanged for the pain of humiliation.

"This," concluded the *Tzemach Tzedek*, "is true self-sacrifice: to give up one's World to Come for the sake of saving the property of a single Jew!"

**R**ebbe Baruch always concealed his deep-seated compassion behind a facade of anger, and it is even told that when he passed away, his finger was resting on the holy *Zohar*, on the words "There is

anger that brings blessing from above and from below and it is called Baruch [i.e., blessed]."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Sanhedrin* 107a

2. *Zohar* 1:184a

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In *Sha'ar HaYichud VeHaEmunah* in the *Tanya*, it is explained that the main attribute of God's compassion is revealed through the miracles and wonders performed by the righteous, and through the miracles and wonders described in the Torah. This applies, of course, to Rebbe Baruch's blessed "rebukes" but also to the seemingly bitter miracles described in the Torah and the Prophets, such as the drought brought about by the prophet Elijah. How can we understand these events as a revelation of God's compassion?

Unlike miracle workers who are not from the side of holiness, like Balaam the wicked and his ilk, the righteous bring about salvation through prayer, called "*rachamei*" [compassion] in Aramaic or through Torah, which corresponds to the *sefirah* of "beauty" (*tiferet*), whose inner

dimension is compassion. Therefore, within the judgment itself, a sweetening is concealed; sometimes it is more revealed, and sometimes less so. The Midrash relates that when Joshua stopped the sun in the sky, saying to it, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon,"<sup>3</sup> the sun came to him with a complaint: "Who will sing my song to God while I am silent?"<sup>4</sup> To this Joshua replied, "I will sing to God in your stead." Indeed, this is hinted to at the beginning of the verse, "Then Joshua spoke to God... 'Sun, stand still upon Gibeon.'" Likewise, when a *tzaddik* stops the rain, as did Elijah, or the sun, like Joshua, or puts on an angry face, like Rebbe Baruch, he himself fills the place of the rain, the sun, or the compassionate look missing from his face.

3. Joshua 10:12.

4. See the article on *Perek Shirah* in this issue.

Once, the holy Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh was traveling on the road with a wagon driver and a few *chasidim*. Rebbe Baruch was accustomed to saying witty remarks, and at that time he also said some humorous things. For everything he said, the wagon driver responded with his own witty remark. The *chasidim* hinted to him not to dare say more for the Rebbe was referring to lofty matters while the wagon driver was saying crude, simple things. However, the wagon driver did not heed them, and throughout the journey he continued making jokes, and they indicated they would punish him for his behavior. But the wagon driver did not pay attention to their warning. When they reached their destination, the *chasidim* wanted to harm the wagon driver.

Rebbe Baruch said to call the wagon driver, and they were astonished to hear that the Rebbe wanted to speak to him. When the wagon driver came to the holy Rebbe, the Rebbe said: "Throughout the entire journey, the wagon driver was not once in a state of sadness, and if so, it is a sign that he is from the side of holiness."

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# FARBRENGEN EXCERPT

## HORIZONTAL EQUALITY

*Equality, the hallmark of modern times, as most know, does not mean uniformity. Equality between husband and wife has, since the days of the Patriarchs been one of the foundational beliefs of Judaism. Sometimes, this equality is elusive, and we can only hope that it is achieved sooner rather than later.*

*In this excerpt from a farbrengen held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Cheshvan 5786, in honor of a granddaughter's marriage, HaRav Ginsburgh talks about the meaning of equality in marriage and how lack of equality is a feature of exile.*

*The full farbrengen was published in the Lech Lecha 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.*

**I**t is written that in the future, during the Days of Mashiach (and the Lubavitcher Rebbe said that we are already living in the Days of Mashiach), the husband and wife need to be equal. The exact idiom used is “equally tall” (שוין בקומתן), which means that both are motivated by the same aspect of the levels of the soul—specifically, by a common will. How can this be achieved? The important thing is that they feel that they share the same mission. They agree on the importance of fulfilling their mission in life. This level of connection is referred to as “my twin” in the Song of Songs, the highest level of connection among: “my sister, my wife, my dove, my twin.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Zohar, this type of connection is described as “balance” (מתקן). One of the most ancient parts of the Zohar writes, “Before there was balance, they [male and female] could not look at each other face to face.” Lack of balance is what caused the shattering of the vessels

and prevented Godliness from revealing itself in reality. The reality that shattered is known as “the World of Chaos.” The reality that God reconstructed from the shattered shards is known as the “World of Rectification.”

### FROM VERTICAL TO HORIZONTAL RELATIONSHIPS

**W**hat we learn from this is that the difference between a state of chaos (that eventually shatters) and a state of rectification (that remains robust) is that chaos is a horizontally oriented, hierarchical relationship between two things (for instance, husband and wife). Rectification is based on a horizontal, face-to-face, egalitarian relationship between two things. Usually in Kabbalah this distinction is applied to the model of the *sefirot*, which in the World of Chaos stood one above the other on a vertical line, but to be rectified, were placed along horizontal axes as well. But this is equally applicable to every area of life.

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1. Song of Songs 5:2.

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In fact, this is the meaning of the verse, “I will make him a helpmate facing him.” The key here is that they are facing each other. When? The sages say, when the man merits, his wife becomes his helper; meaning, that if the husband understands that his wife is his equal, they will merit a good life together. But, if he feels that he is superior to her, meaning that he is above her, and their relationship is based on a vertical hierarchy, she will oppose him. It is mostly the husband who needs to choose: Will I treat my wife as my equal or as my inferior.

So long as a man is not married, his innate approach is hierarchical. Only when he gets married can he begin to build a relationship based on equality with his wife. This reminds us of the famous saying from Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak of Pshischa (known as the *Heilige Yid*). He said that when there are two dots arranged horizontally in the Chumash or Siddur, it indicates God’s essential Name, *Havayah* (interlocked with the Name *Adni*). But when two dots are arranged vertically, with one superior to the other, that is a sign that this is “the end [of a verse].” The ability to align ourselves horizontally with others begins at home, in our marital relationship.

## LOCALITY AND NON-LOCALITY

**A**nother point to add to this is that regardless of how close two dots are, when they are arranged vertically, their essence is as far apart as can be. Because there is no real connection between them, the physical distance between them does not matter. Internally, they might as well be

at opposite ends of the Universe. But, when two dots are arranged horizontally—when a husband and wife, or any two people, see each other face to face—even if they physically are indeed at opposite ends of the Universe—they are spiritually and essentially near.

In physics this is known as a non-local phenomenon due to quantum coupling, which means that two particles (or two galaxies, it can happen at any scale theoretically) can exchange information between them instantaneously even if they are at opposite ends of the Universe, all because they are coupled. Coupled particles are truly like identical twins. Because they are equal, they are always together, regardless.

## EXILE AND THE VERTICAL DIMENSION

**O**ur aspiration is that we all face one another, that we see eye to eye. When considering the correspondence between vertical and horizontal relationships and axes, the length dimension is vertical and the width dimension is horizontal (the dimension of depth is an inner dimension, revealing the hidden depths of a relationship). In Kabbalah, the word length is associated with the line (or ray) of infinite light that brings God’s revelation into reality, but the line is always associated with hierarchy. There are those that are closer to the line’s origin, and as it penetrates further and further into reality, it represents a greater distance from Godliness.

We use the word “length” to indicate the “length of our exile.” It follows then that the state of exile is prolonged because

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we find ourselves relating to one another vertically (length) instead of horizontally (width).<sup>2</sup> To end the exile, we must adopt a horizontal mentality.

The holy Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin said that the way to combat the heresy that will be rampant before Mashiach comes is by conducting as many farbrengens as possible. In an authentic Chasidic farbrengen everyone is equal. There is no explicit hierarchy between the participants. Everyone is facing everyone else, which is why it is common that words of rebuke are heard when one participant

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2. One can tie this to the shape of the Land of Israel today. Even though the land is described as wide (Exodus 3:8: “a good and wide land, a land flowing with milk and honey”), currently it is “longer” than it is “wide,” indicating that our relationships are governed by a vertical positioning rather than a horizontal one that would be based on equality and seeing face to face.

feels that another deserves it.

## TRUE PARTNERSHIP

**W**e have spoken about the various signs and *gematriot* related to this year 5786. One of them is that 786 is the value of the holy Name, השתפא, which is the *Atbash* letter substitution of God’s Name, “Hosts” (צבאות). Even though this does not seem to be a word in Hebrew, השתפא is considered the Name associated with “partnership” (שתפות). In fact when we write 786 as תשפ"ו, the letters can be rearranged to spell the word “partner” (שותף).

Every household should be rich in possessions, and the husband and wife should be equal partners in them all. Of course, the best partner of all to have is God Himself. The Rebbe is also a very good partner to have.

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# FARBRENGEN EXCERPT

## THE SOUL OF A BA'AL TESHUVA

*Perhaps the most important societal change in Judaism in the past 50 years is the rise of the teshuvah movement. Many (if not most) of the readers of this magazine would identify themselves as ba'alei teshuvah. HaRav Ginsburgh himself identifies as a ba'al teshuvah despite returning to observance at 16. Being a ba'al teshuvah (or ba'alat teshuvah) has its unique challenges.*

*This excerpt from a farbrengen held during Sukkot 5786 paves an interesting path for finding one's identity as a ba'al teshuvah based on Rabbi Isaac Luria's (the Arizal) teachings to his disciple, Rabbi Chaim Vital about the latter's previous incarnations.*

*The full farbrengen was published in the No'ach 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.*

**T**he commentary known as *Maggid Mishneh* is the major commentary on Maimonides' *Yad*—his legal corpus. The Arizal states that this is because the author's soul is bound in essence with Maimonides' soul. The fact that someone dedicates his life to interpreting a particular book reveals that their souls are bound together.

Of all the *Rishonim*—the scholars of the Middle Ages—it seems that the Arizal dedicates more of his teachings to the *Maggid Mishneh* than to any other. Most of this was directed at his disciple, Rabbi Chaim Vital, and was meant to reveal to him the origin of his soul, i.e., who he is spiritually. Rabbi Chaim Vital's origin is in the *Maggid Mishneh*. As great as the *Maggid Mishneh* was—he is a contemporary of the Ran, Rabbeinu Nissim—very little is known about him. There are different theories about who his teacher was,<sup>1</sup> we do

not know when he was born, most people do not even know that his name was Vidal, or as he was known by some: Don Vidal. This is one of the things the Arizal told Rabbi Chaim Vital: your name “Vital,” derives from the *Maggid Mishneh's* given name, Vidal. Even though it is pronounced “Veetal,” when written in English it is easy to see that both Veedal and Veetal mean the same thing: “life.” So says the Arizal to Rabbi Chaim Vital, both your first name, Chaim, and last name, Vidal, mean the same thing—life—and both are derived from the *Maggid Mishneh's* first name.

In the Arizal's explanation of reincarnations, many of them are meant as a *tikkun*, a rectification for some issue that forces the soul to reincarnate. What

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*Rashba.* The Arizal states that he was a disciple of the *Ra'ah*, the author of *Sefer HaChinuch*. Modern scholarship believes that he was a student of Rabbi Peretz HaCohen who was a disciple of both the *Rashba* and the *Ra'ah*.

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1. Some opinions hold that he studied under the

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was the *Maggid Mishneh's* issue? We would not use this word if the Arizal had not used it. In any case, his issue was the same issue that Maimonides had; neither received the concealed tradition of Torah. Instead, they studied philosophy. The Arizal writes that they even denied the concealed tradition. Therefore, the Arizal says to his disciple Rabbi Chaim Vital, you are the *Maggid Mishneh's* main reincarnation. In your past lifetime you already learnt in-depth enough of the revealed tradition of Torah, which is why you do not invest yourself in it so much in this lifetime. Instead, you are completely immersed in the concealed tradition, because that is where your rectification lies. As it says, "...the Torah of *Havayah* is his desire, and in his Torah, he will immerse day and night."<sup>2</sup> The inner desire of a Torah scholar, meaning the subjects that his heart desires, they constitute the portion of Torah allotted to him to learn for his rectification in his present lifetime. So, in his lifetime, the *Maggid Mishneh* did not learn the Torah's concealed tradition and did not even believe in its verity; in his present incarnation, Rabbi Chaim Vital came to immerse in the concealed tradition.

## WHEN A SOUL EMERGES FROM THE DEPTHS

**T**he inner message the Arizal taught Rabbi Chaim Vital involves King David. How so? King David's soul was a very lofty one. But with the Shattering of the Vessels in the World of Chaos and then with Adam's sin,<sup>3</sup> his soul fell into the

deepest realm of the *kelipot*—the husks of impurity. He was trapped there so tightly that there was no normal way to redeem his soul. Nonetheless, his time came, his *mazal* was great, and his soul was able to escape the *kelipot*, but a very powerful evil inclination attached itself to his soul. This is the explanation for his failures in life,<sup>4</sup> the most important of which is his sin with Batsheva. Even though the sages say that "whomever says that David sinned is wrong,"<sup>5</sup> the plain reading is that he sinned, was punished severely, and then did *teshuvah* from the bottom of his heart. The sages state that the reason for David's failures was, "to instruct about *teshuvah* for the individual," meaning that every individual can do *teshuvah* regardless of his or her situation.

What happens when a great soul emerges from the depths of the *kelipot*? Everyone listening can think of themselves in this context.... When the Arizal uses the terminology "the depths of the *kelipot*" he means it in a spiritual sense, not yet a soul that is embodied in our physical reality. But this relates to a *ba'al teshuvah* who in this world finds themselves deep in the *kelipot*, deep in impurity. Our generation is one of *ba'alei teshuvah*—of many people who have found their way back to Judaism and observance. We have said many times in the past that the rectification of the

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sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, but David is considered his primary reincarnation thus far in history and the Mashiach will be his final reincarnation as alluded to in the word "Adam" (אָדָם) whose letters are the initials of "Adam, David, Mashiach" (אָדָם דָּוִד מָשִׁיחַ).

4. *Yoma* 22b. See the Rav's class from 14 Iyar, 5775.

5. *Shabbat* 56a.

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2. Psalms 1:2.

3. All souls were and still are affected by Adam's



State of Israel depends on *ba'alei teshuvah* taking the helm of its leadership.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Mashiach himself is a *ba'al teshuvah*.<sup>7</sup>

### THREE INCARNATIONS BEFORE EMBODIMENT

**T**he Arizal explains that once a great soul that was trapped in the *kelipot* emerges for the first time, it cannot immediately receive a body. It first must go through three incarnations where it serves as a surrounding force for some individual who belongs to the same soul root. Only then can it receive its own body. This is obviously a very deep idea, which is described as, “elusive and deep, deep down; who can grasp it?”<sup>8</sup>

What we can say about the application

6. Beginning with the class from 3 Elul 5773 (ch. 3).

7. See classes from 12 Tammuz 5773 and 1 Elul 5779.

8. Ecclesiastes 7:24.

of this idea is that before a *ba'al teshuvah* can enter his own body—i.e., before he or she can appreciate who they are, know what they are capable of, and receive their true mission in life—they need to act like a surrounding force for three Jews. This means that they need to exhibit self-sacrifice for them, truly dedicate themselves to three other people. From heaven, they will be guided to meet these people, three people who are from their own soul root. After they have completed this task, which can take a very long time—sometimes years of dedication to a person can pass and the *ba'al teshuvah* has still not entered themselves fully—they are guaranteed to appreciate who they are and find their mission in life.

This is what is required from a true *ba'al teshuvah*. In merit of their self-sacrifice over years to three other people, they will merit to fully recognize who they are.



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